



# An Overview of Advanced Elastomeric Seal Development and Testing Capabilities at NASA Glenn Research Center

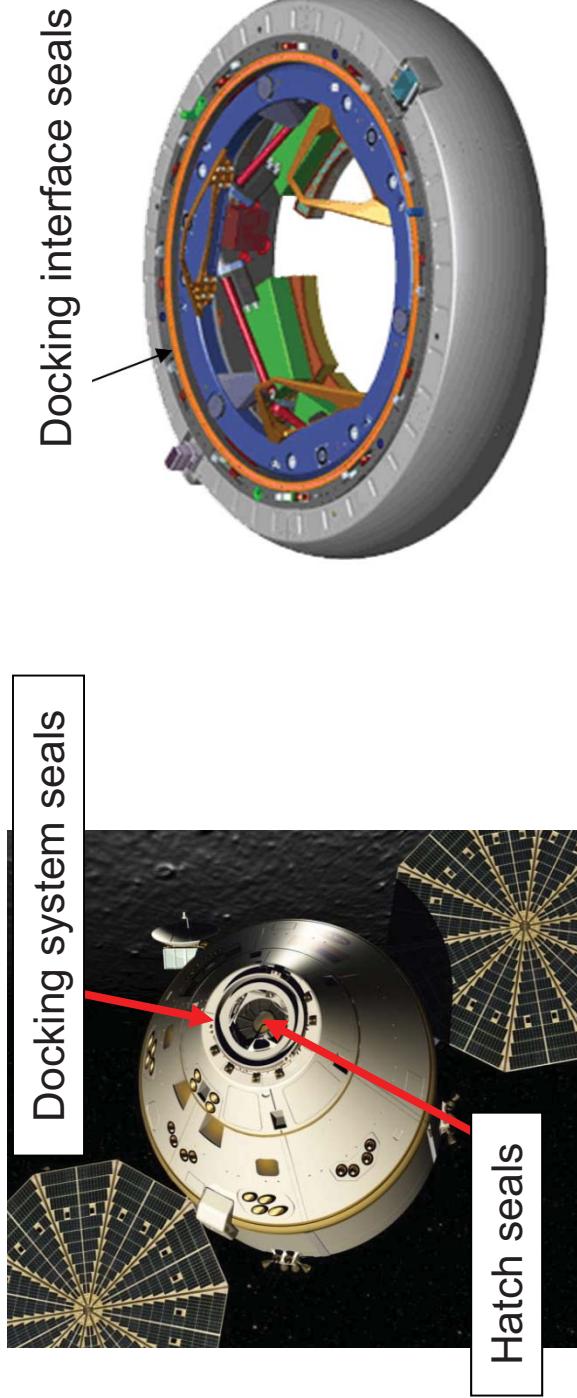
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# Introduction



- NASA is developing advanced space-rated vacuum seals for future missions to low Earth orbit (LEO), the Moon, near Earth asteroids, and other destinations
  - Includes seals for a new docking system and vehicle hatches
  - NASA GRC has developed unique testing capabilities to evaluate seal performance under representative operating conditions (thermal, vacuum, and engagement)

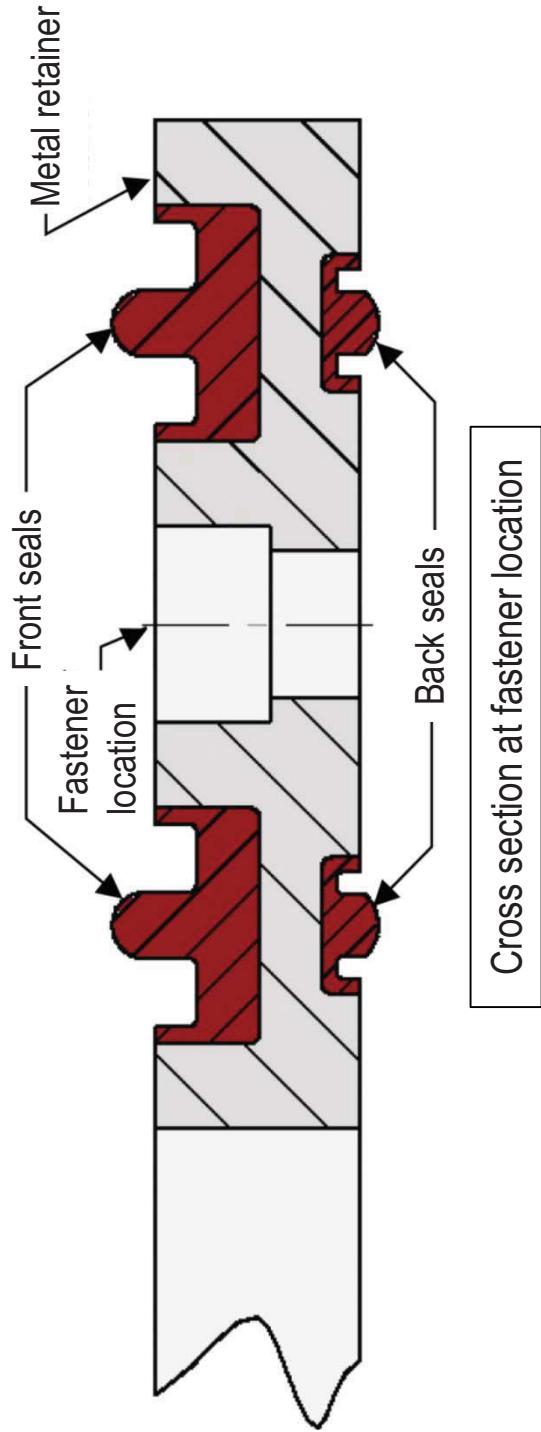


# Advanced Seal Development

- **Seal characteristics:**
  - Diameters up to ~50 in.
  - Typically made of elastomeric materials (e.g., silicone)
  - Extremely low leak rates to ensure that astronauts have sufficient breathable air for extended missions
  - Low enough compression loads so mechanisms can compress them
  - Low adhesion loads when sealed interface has to be separated (e.g., undocking, hatch opening)
- **Candidate seal designs:**
  - Gask-O-seal® (Parker Hannifin Corporation)
  - Multi-piece seal
  - O-rings
- **Seal design features are tailored to meet requirements for each application**



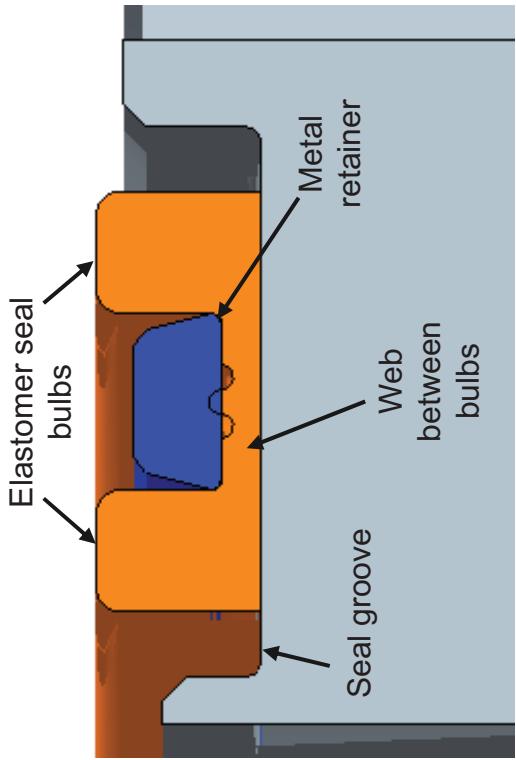
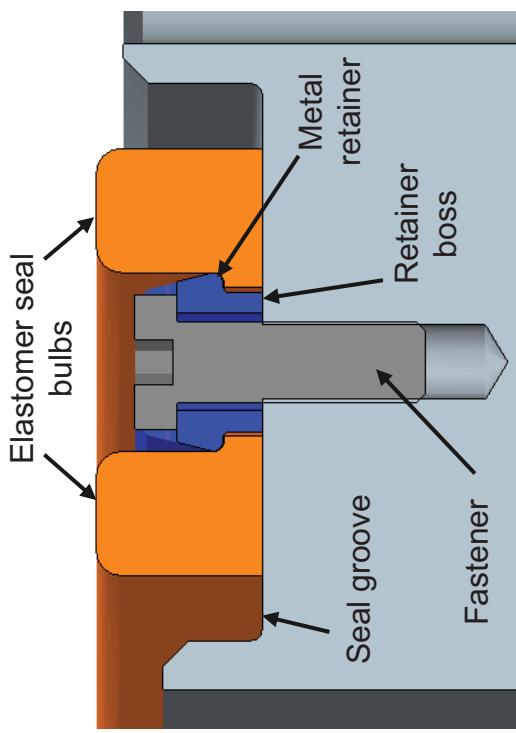
# Candidate Seal Design: Gask-O-Seal



- **Silicone elastomer seal bulbs molded directly into grooves of metallic (e.g., aluminum) retainer to form single-piece assembly**
- Dual bulbs on front and back for redundancy
- No separate seal groove(s) required on structure
- Space flight experience: Used on Common Berthing Mechanism (CBM) and other locations on ISS



# Candidate Seal Design: Multi-Piece Seal

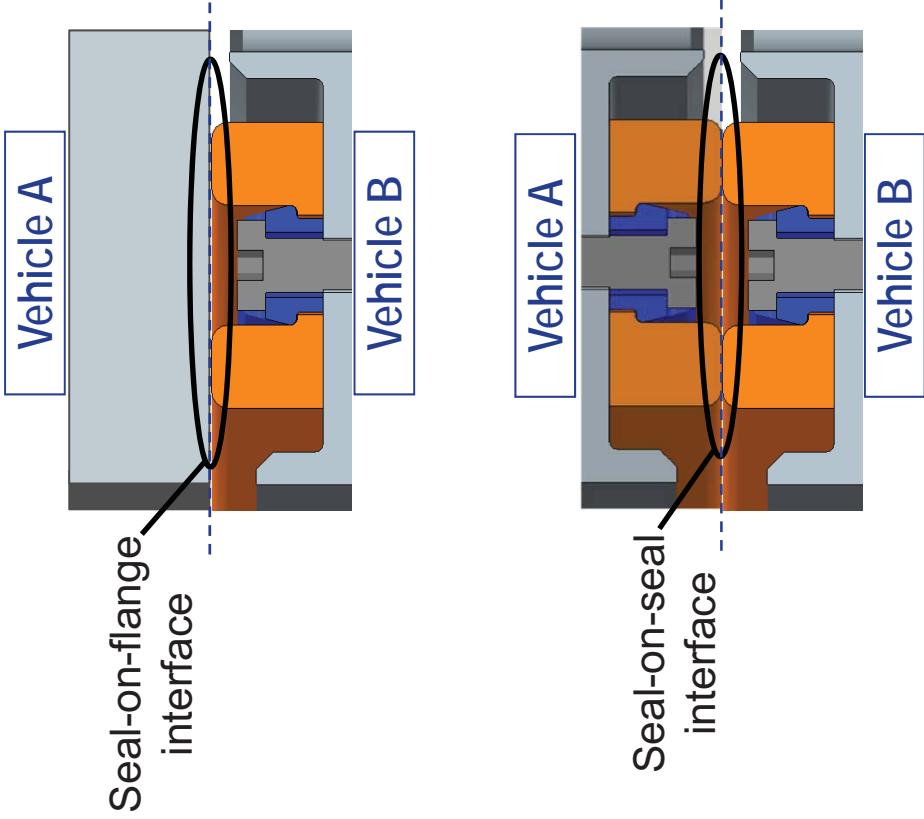


- **Seal has separate elastomer and retainer elements**
  - Elastomer element: Two seal bulbs (redundancy) connected by web
  - Retainer:
    - Periodic bosses pass through openings in web
    - Anchors elastomer element to structure
      - Single piece or multi-segment
  - Installed in groove



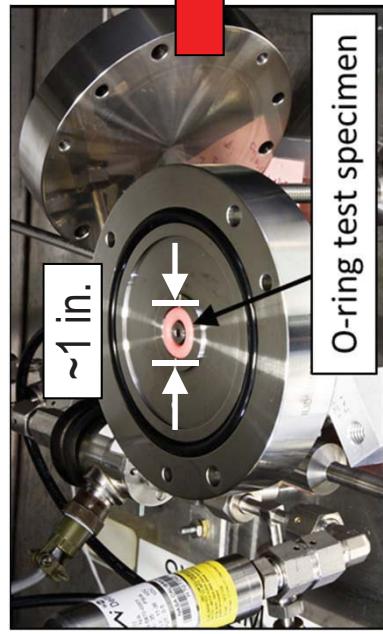
# Testing Capabilities

- NASA GRC has developed unique test fixtures to evaluate performance of candidate seal designs under representative operating conditions
  - Performance measurements:
    - Leak rate
    - Compression loads
    - Adhesion loads
    - Pull-out/bond strength
    - Durability
  - Test conditions:
    - Thermal conditions (warm, cold)
    - Vacuum
    - Mating conditions: Seal-on-seal vs. seal-on-flange
    - Engagement conditions:
      - Fully compressed vs. gapped
      - Aligned vs. misaligned
    - Redundant seals

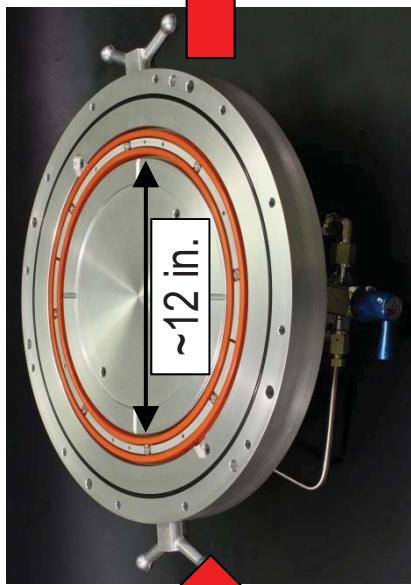




# Typical Seal Development & Testing Process

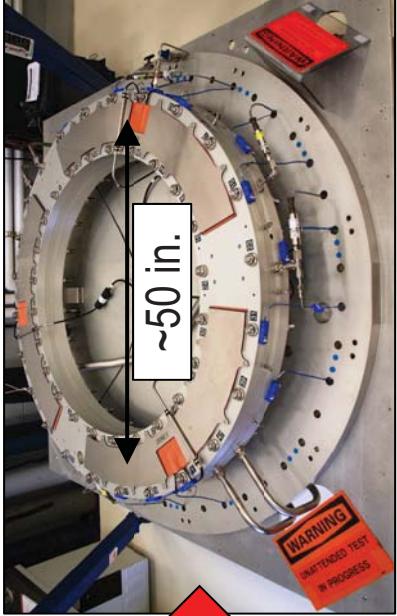


Screening tests using O-rings and small material samples



Development tests using subscale (~12 in. dia.) versions of larger seals

- Less expensive
- Faster
- Some tests too difficult to perform at full-scale



Final demonstration of seal performance at full-scale

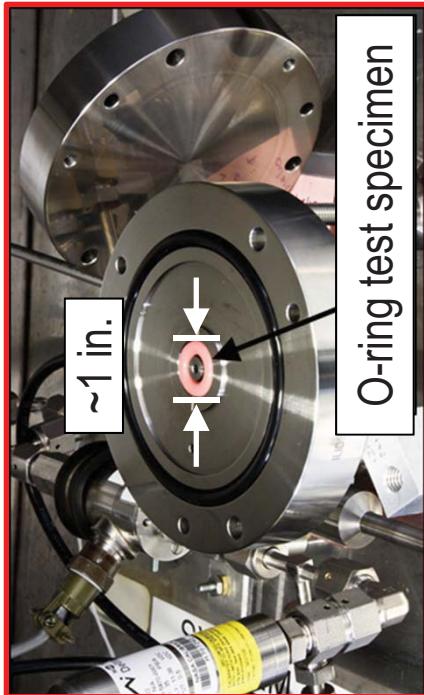


# Small-Scale Seal Testing



# Small-Scale Seal Leak Testing

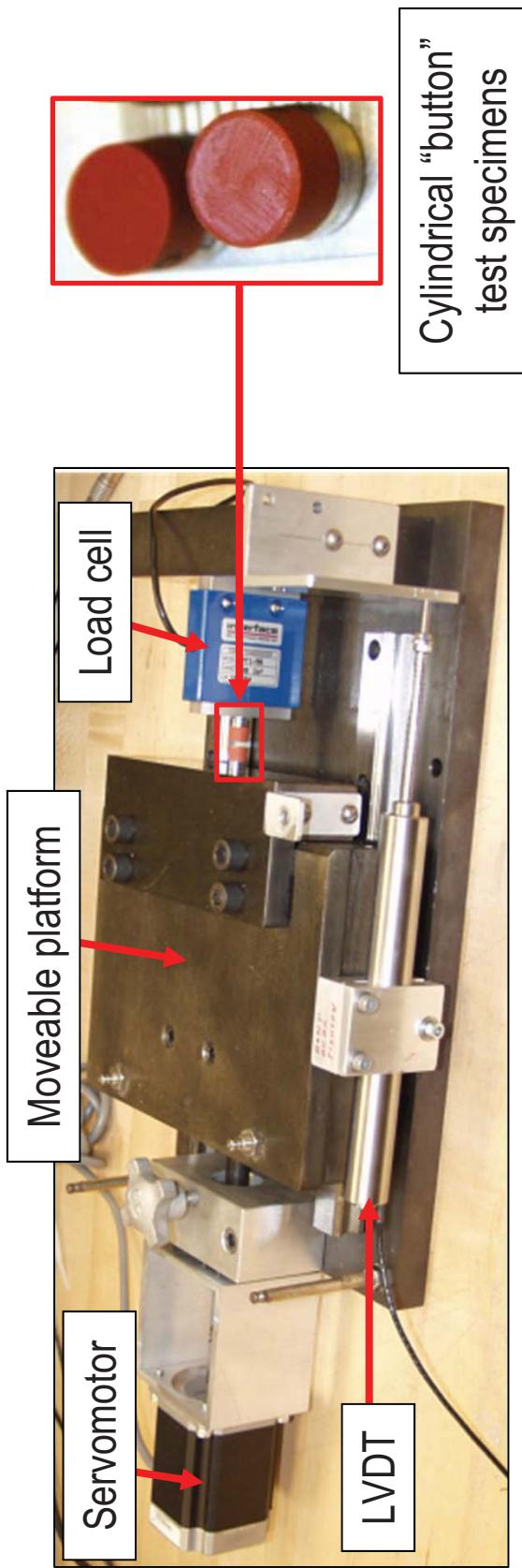
- Objective: Measure leak rates for small-scale seals made of candidate materials
- Testing capabilities:
  - Several versions of test fixtures to test specimens of various sizes and designs (e.g., 2-309 O-rings)
  - Leakage measurements using either helium or air
  - Temperatures of -238 to 1122°F (-150 to 600°C) using Tenney test chambers
  - Adjustable pressure differentially across seal (typically 14.7 psid)
  - Fully or partially compressed seals



Test fixture inside environmental control chamber



## Small-Scale Seal Compression & Adhesion Testing



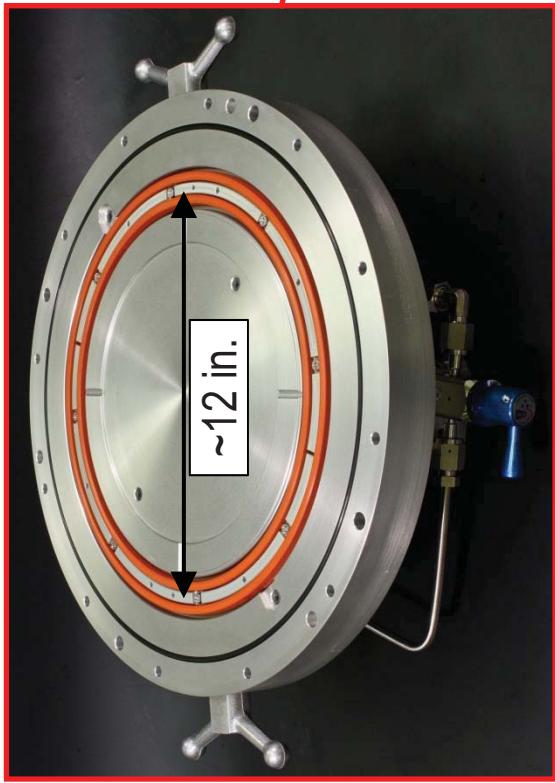
- Objective: Measure compression and adhesion loads for small seals and material test specimens made of candidate materials
- Testing capabilities:
  - Compression and adhesion load measurements
  - Room temperature tests
  - Load cycling with programmable loading and unloading profiles
  - Seal-on-flange or seal-on-seal mating



# Medium-Scale Seal Testing



# Medium-Scale Seal Leak Testing

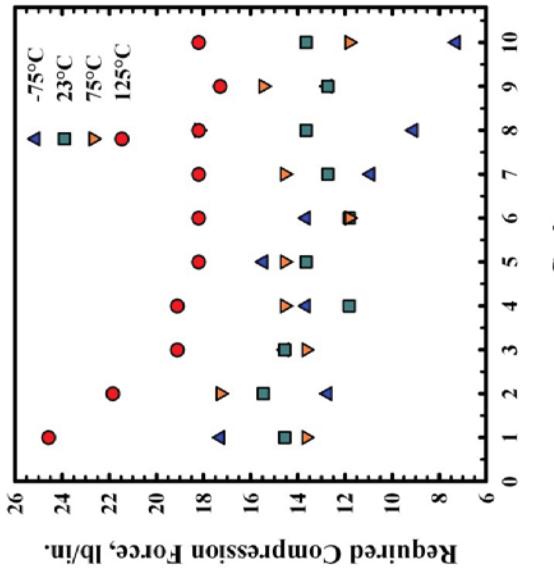
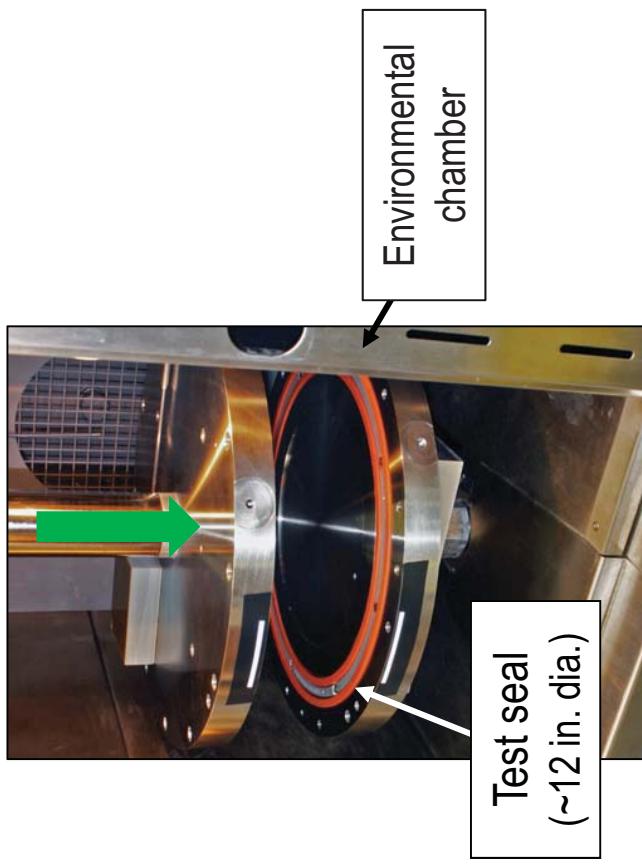


Medium-scale seal leak test fixture  
(Note: Top of test fixture not installed)

- Objective: Measure medium-scale seal leak rates under representative operating conditions
- Testing capabilities:
  - Leakage measurements for either inner or outer seal bulb using helium or air
  - Temperatures of -238 to 1122°F (-150 to 600°C) using Tenney test chambers
  - Adjustable pressure differential across seal (typically 14.7 psid)
  - Nominal (fully compressed, aligned) and off-nominal (gapped, radially misaligned) mating
  - Seal-on-flange or seal-on-seal mating
  - Multiple chambers and fixtures facilitate testing in parallel



# Medium-Scale Seal Compression & Adhesion Testing

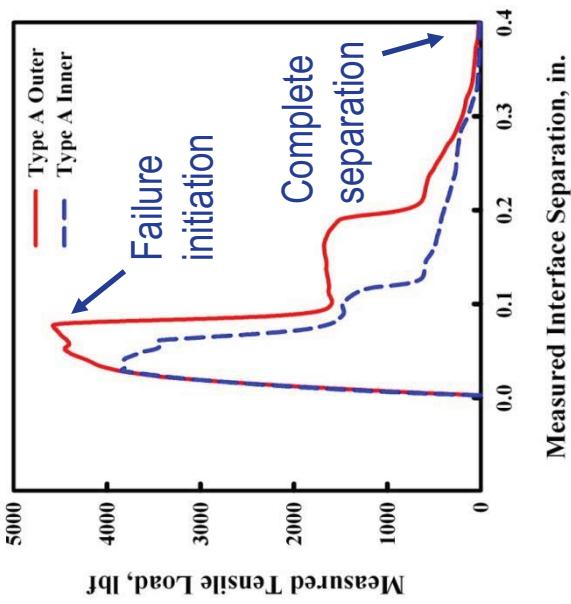
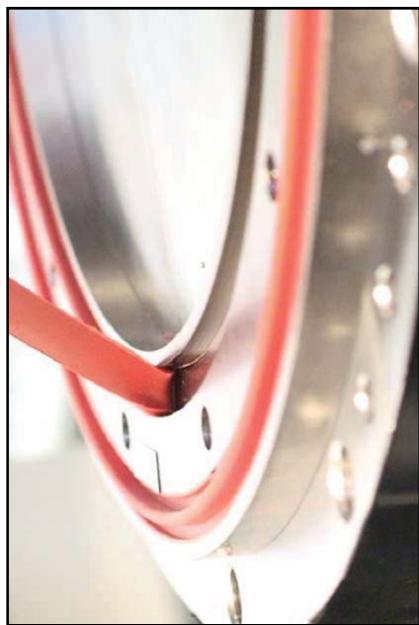


Representative seal compression data  
(Ref. Bastrzyk, M.B., AIAA-2010-6908, Fig. 9)

- **Objective:** Measure medium-scale seal compression and adhesion loads under simulated mating conditions
- **Testing capabilities:**
  - Compression and adhesion load measurements
  - Temperatures of -238 to 662°F (-150 to 350°C) using Instron 3119-407A2 environmental chamber
  - Programmable loading/unloading profiles with load cycling via Instron 5584 electromechanical load frame
  - Seal-on-plate or seal-on-seal mating



## Medium-Scale Seal Pull-Out/Bond Strength Testing



Gask-O-seal bulb being pulled out of retainer during bond strength test



Representative test results (Ref. Conrad, M., AIAA-2009-5318)

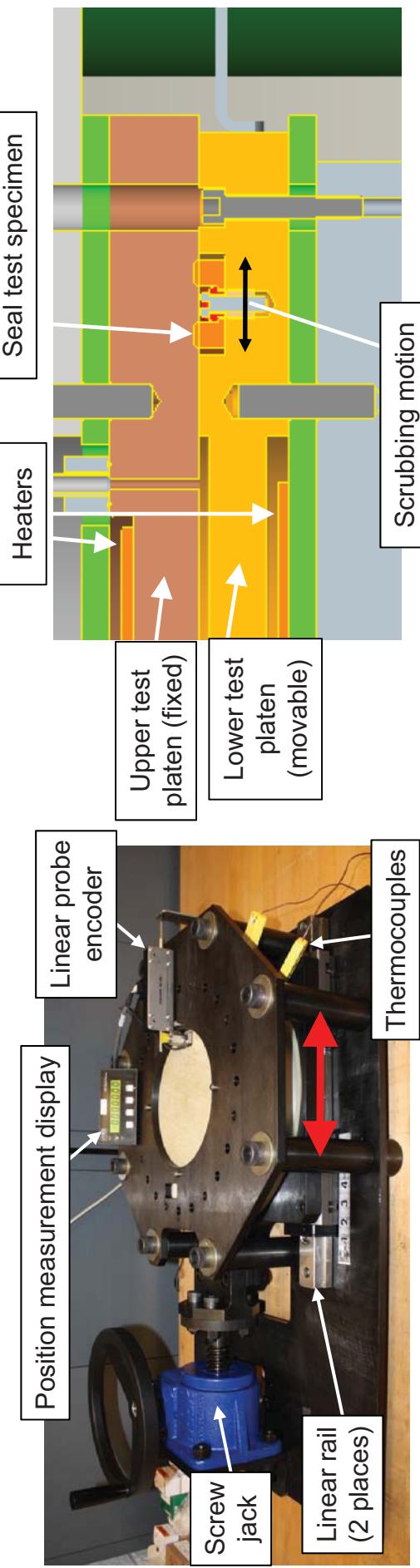
- Objective: Quantify the force required to remove a seal from its retaining feature at representative operating temperatures

- Testing capabilities:

- Test specimens of various sizes and designs
- Temperatures of -238 to 662°F (-150 to 350°C) using Instron model 3119-407A2 environmental chamber
- Tests utilize same load frames used for compression and adhesion tests



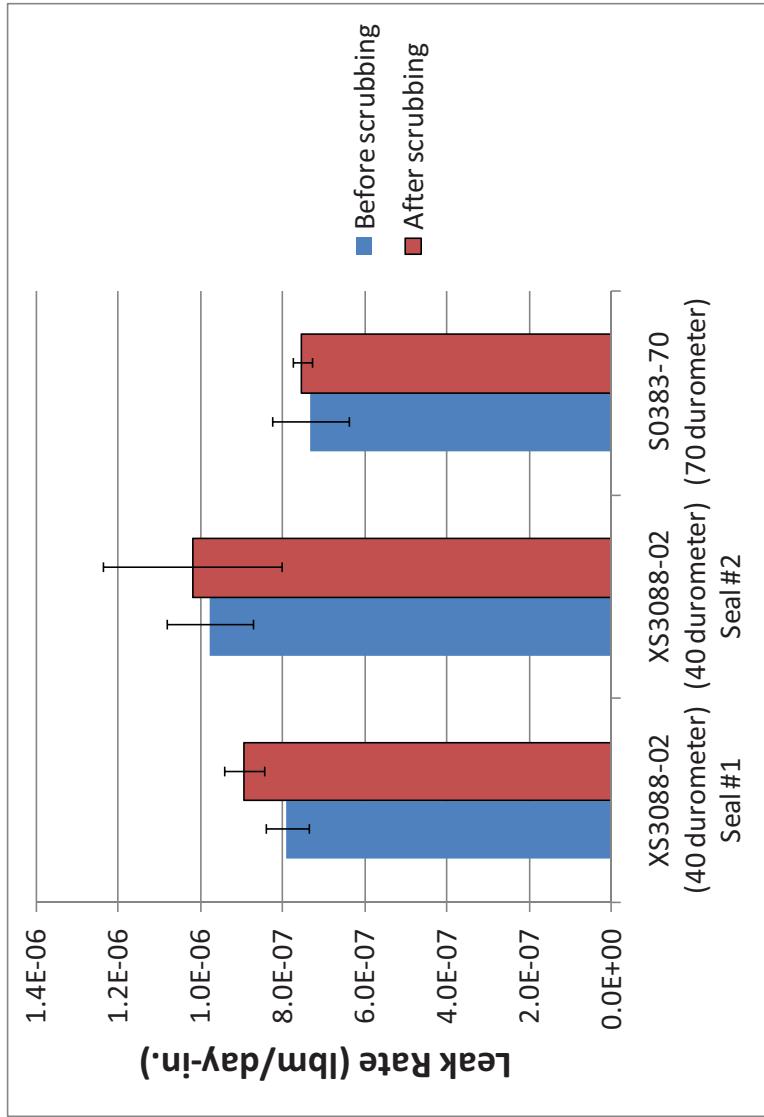
# Medium-Scale Seal Durability Testing



- Objectives:
  - Subject medium-scale seals to lateral “scrubbing” they could experience during mating or thermal equilibration
  - Evaluate effects of scrubbing on seal adhesion and leak rates
- Testing capabilities:
  - Multiple scrub cycles
  - Amount of compression on seals can be set independently
  - Temperatures: RT to 142°F (RT to 61°C)
  - Test plates were designed so adhesion tests and leak tests could be performed on a seal before and after it was scrubbed without having to remove it from test plates (minimize handling)



# Medium-Scale Seal Durability Testing (cont.)



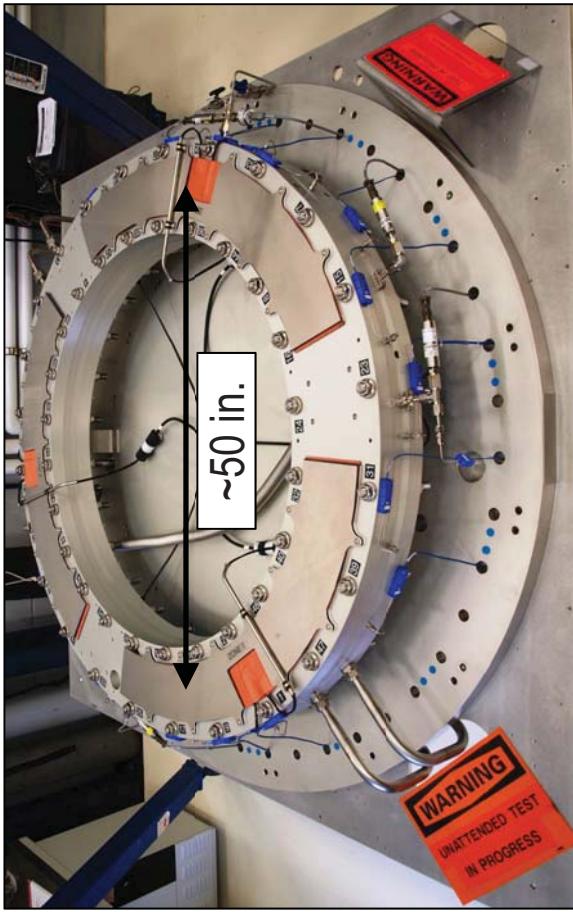
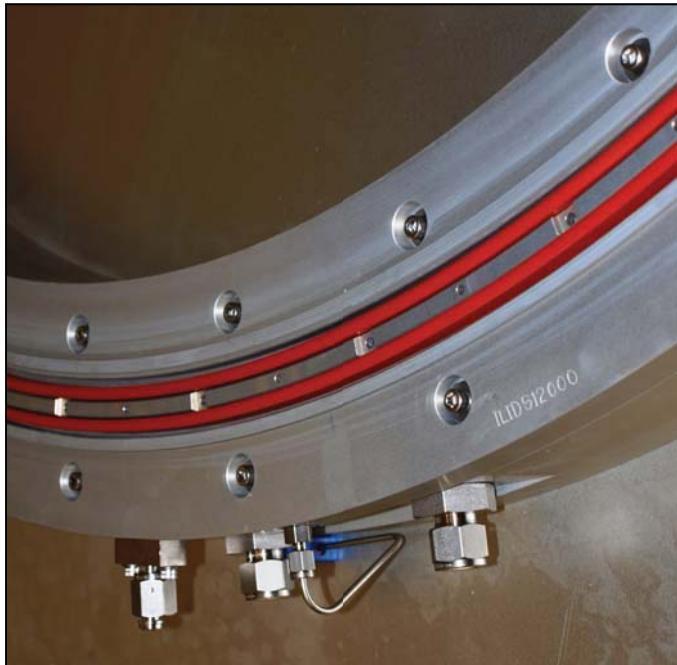
Representative test results  
(Ref. Dunlap, P.H., AIAA-2011-5710)



# Full-Scale Seal Testing



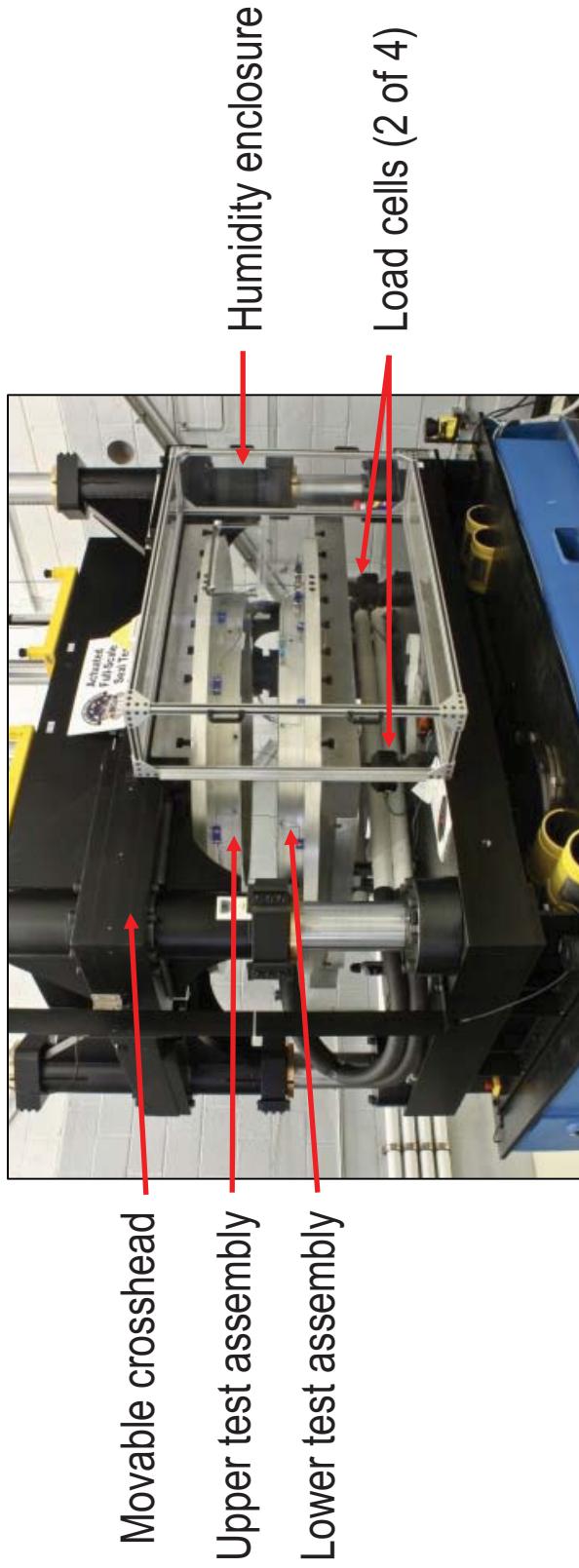
# Full-Scale Seal Leak Testing



- Objective: Measure full-scale seal leak rates under representative operating conditions
- Testing capabilities:
  - Leakage measurements for either inner or outer seal bulb using helium or air
  - Temperatures of -67 to 212°F (-55 to 100°C) using Mydax 2VLH30W chiller/heater
  - 14.7 psia to vacuum pressure differential across seal bulbs
  - Nominal (fully compressed, aligned) and off-nominal (gapped, radially misaligned)
  - Seal-on-flange or seal-on-seal mating



# Full-Scale Seal Compression, Adhesion, & Leak Testing



- Objectives:
  - Measure full-scale seal compression and adhesion loads under simulated docking and undocking conditions
  - Measure seal leak rates after load cycling and at various compression levels
- Testing capabilities:
  - Temperatures of -58 to 203°F (-50 to 95°C) using Mydax 2V LH30W chiller/heater
  - Load cycling via Instron SATEC Series Custom 600kN hydraulic load frame
  - Programmable loading and unloading profiles
  - Seal-on-flange or seal-on-seal mating
  - Simplified leakage measurements using air



## Summary

- NASA is developing advanced space-rated elastomeric seals for future space exploration missions
- NASA GRC has developed unique test fixtures to measure leak rates and compression and adhesion loads of candidate seal designs under simulated thermal, vacuum, and engagement conditions
  - Small-scale seal test fixtures used mainly for material screening tests
  - Medium-scale seal test fixtures used to test subscale versions of larger seal designs for development testing and other seal designs (~12 in. in diameter
  - Full-scale seal test fixtures permit testing of seals (~50 in. in diameter under representative operating conditions
  - Test conditions include:
    - Temperatures ranging from -238 to 1122°F (-150 to 600°C)
    - Operational pressure gradients
    - Seal-on-seal or seal-on-flange mating configurations
    - Nominal and off-nominal conditions (e.g., incomplete seal compression)
- Test fixtures are designed with flexibility to accommodate future candidate seal designs required to support NASA's ongoing missions for deep space exploration



## Acknowledgments

- International Low Impact Docking System (iLIDS) team from NASA JSC
- Team members from NASA GRC, the University of Akron, the University of Toledo, Ohio Aerospace Institute, Analex Corporation, QinetiQ North America, Vantage Partners, LLC, and Gilcrest Electric & Supply Company who contributed to the design, fabrication, installation, and operation of the test fixtures



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